

# Should I Say Anything?

*by Ltjg. Mathew Dodge*

**A**s a recently winged naval flight officer at the Hawkeye FRS, one of my duties was to fly in the back of the tube and provide a safety and fire-warning watch during pilot-training hops. Many of us got to be canaries in these pilot-training flights. I never had experienced any emergency in the E-2C, but that was about to change.

My first in-flight emergency occurred during a night-training flight. I was flying with an experienced instructor pilot and a replacement pilot who had just come off several months of being medically down for a broken arm. Our transit to Elizabeth City, N.C., was uneventful. I was monitoring the radios as the instructor grilled the student pilot on aircraft systems and emergency procedures. We shot an instrument approach and entered the landing pattern.

Our first few touch-and-goes went well, considering the student's long layoff from flying. On the third touchdown, I heard something unusual. It wasn't loud, but it definitely wasn't normal. Should I tell the pilots? I questioned whether or not my vast experience in the E-2 would qualify me to speak up. As I contemplated the situation, I heard a voice over the radio from a


Harrier pilot, who also was in the pattern, advising the controller, "Tower, you might want to tell the E-2 in front of me to check their tires. I think they might have blown one." Acting on the radio transmission, I immediately told the pilot about the peculiar sound I had heard on our last touch-and-go.

I broke out the flashlight from my SV-2 to inspect the right mainmount tire. I saw a huge hole in it. As I pulled out my PCL, the pilots already were going through the checklist and coordinating an arrested landing.

The arrested landing at NAS Norfolk was a real show for me. When the right main-landing gear touched down on the runway with its flat tire, the sparks flew by my window. We kept a good scan to make sure nothing had caught on fire when we landed. After the engines were shut down, everyone hurried out of the aircraft. By going through the procedures, we had landed the aircraft

with minimal damage to the airframe and no injuries to the aircrew.

But what would have happened had that Harrier not been behind us?

I thought about that question later. Would I have spoken up and said something about the sound I had heard? The consequences of not saying anything could have been severe. Our pilots had no indication the tire was blown and would have done the next touch-and-go thinking the airplane was 4.0. Anything could have happened with a student pilot landing a plane with a blown tire. Fortunately, it didn't take a real-world catastrophe to teach me a lesson that I already should have known. As a member of the aircrew, you are responsible for reporting anything that happens out of the ordinary. It is not a matter of one's experience level or rank in the airplane. 

Ltjg. Dodge is the communications officer in VAW-117.

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